Emerging Voices:
The Shifting Rhetorics of Style:
Writing in Action in *Modern Rhetoric*

Tara Lockhart

Ever since word got out that *Modern Rhetoric* was in the making, teachers of composition have felt more than an ordinary interest in the project. Each of the authors was a commanding figure: Cleanth Brooks as one of the lawgivers of the New Criticism and Robert Penn Warren as a Pulitzer Prize novelist. Nothing commonplace could issue from such a collaboration.


Every textbook is an archive of instruction. [. . .] It carries out inherited attitudes, visible, for example, in a proposed sequence of learning, in notions about student work or progress, in evaluative terms or standards, in its pedagogical routines [. . .] the value [lies in] attending to the material archive, both past and current, in which we are always immersed.

—Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen Carr, and Lucille Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*

Paul Butler’s 2008 book *Out of Style* provided an important reminder of the role that style plays in our field. Butler’s project rehabilitates the history of style, a history, he writes, that the field of composition has erased. Building on the small currents of renewed interest in the study of style that began in 2000 with Robert Connor’s “The Erasure of the Sentence,” Butler interrogates the notion that the “Golden Age” of style from the 1960s through the mid-1980s focused primarily on ideas of syntax and correctness often allied with current-traditional rhetoric. Instead, he details the rich and various stylistic studies that emerged during this period, the ways that pedagogies of style overlapped with and supported elements of the process movement still important to rhetoric and composition, and the ways that style was

Tara Lockhart is an assistant professor of English at San Francisco State University, where she teaches primarily in the undergraduate and graduate composition programs. Her published work considers essayists such as Edward Said and Gloria Anzaldúa, the literary and pedagogical possibilities of the essay genre, hybridity in writing, and style.

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related to (instead of separate from, and after) invention. Given these arguments, Butler concludes that reanimating our attention to style not only provides “theoretical knowledge of the systems underlying stylistic resources, practical knowledge about how writers learn to deploy them, and the potential value of that knowledge for composition practice and pedagogy,” but, equally important, provides a way for the field to wrest back discussions of style within the public sphere, which too often conflates style with grammar, correctness, and prescriptive rules (13).

Butler’s scholarship questions the ways that style has been absent both within the classroom and within the field’s theoretical conversations. Other composition scholars are beginning to interrogate the history of style as well. For example, Elizabeth Weiser contends that the changes in preferred methodology within the field—moving away from empirical study, behaviorist beliefs, and anything smacking of formalism—combined with the changes in rhetorical emphasis—from text to writer to, eventually, audience—“deprived style of much of its institutional authority and intellectual interest” (29). Rebecca Moore Howard similarly situates the disavowal of style within the rise of composition as a discipline, noting that disciplinary status required an expanded “range of inquiry” beyond the sentence and its affiliation with correctness (47). Given these arguments, contemporary research on style aims to reassert style’s importance to the field by recovering and developing pedagogies that can help students expand their rhetorical and invention repertoires (Lu; Farmer; Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell; Johnson; Johnson and Pace; Duncan; Butler, Style in Rhetoric and Composition). Although such research has been crucial in reconsidering how style-oriented pedagogies might contribute to successful writing instruction, little attention has been paid to the role of a crucial component in the theory, practice, and transmission of style: textbooks.

In what follows, I begin to fill in this piece of the puzzle through an examination of four editions of Modern Rhetoric, the composition textbook written by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. Investigating the textbook authored by these famous writers—known more widely for their Understanding Poetry series, their participation in the literary method known as the New Criticism, and of course their vast, individual bodies of work—has several key benefits. First, it answers Butler’s call for increased scholarship on style within “composition’s rich textbook tradition,” while simultaneously offering a rereading of two prominent stylists who attempted to transfer their intimate understanding of literary style to the field of composition (Out of Style 150). My analysis of Modern Rhetoric offers evidence that midcentury practices were not narrowly constructed around issues of clarity or developing syntactic maturity, as many accounts of the period would have us believe. Second, by charting the local details and fluctuations across four editions of a textbook that has received scant critical attention, I excavate what Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen Carr, and Lucille Schultz call the “archive of instruction” present in a composition textbook,
the editions of which span nearly forty years, paying particular attention to the ways the text both upholds and challenges the inherited attitudes and pedagogies of the time. I draw attention to the interplay between the expectations of textbook consumers (and reviewers) and the authors, highlighting the intellectual and pedagogical struggle that these two acclaimed teachers and theorists had in articulating their vision of how writing might be productively taught. In the fluctuations in emphasis across editions, I draw a picture of two teacher-scholars adapting their ideas to new settings, new students (including those entering education under the GI Bill), and a burgeoning new field. I read the fluctuations across editions as a series of negotiations made amid forces that were personal, disciplinary, ideological, and cultural.

Finally, because “style,” for Brooks and Warren (as for many scholars of style), was intimately tied to personality, I chart the negotiation found in these textbooks between broader, rhetorical versions of style and the teaching of style as a way of encouraging students to develop as a particular type of writer. As Debra Hawhee and others have argued, textbooks not only shape the content of the course, but more important, shape students and teachers by constructing and disciplining specific subject positions for them to occupy. Indeed, H. R. Swardson pointed out in response to the Brooks and Warren textbooks that the new critical revolution was not, in fact, the focus on the text, but a refocusing on the character of the reader/writer/student in classical terms (rational, skeptical, consistent, and so on) (417–20). As my analysis will illustrate, the type of reader and student that Brooks and Warren’s texts aimed to construct did exhibit these traits; yet at the same time, and perhaps surprisingly, their model student is nonetheless one we probably still value today: curious and skeptical, sensitive to language and style, capable of comparison and synthesis, and above all, interested in acts of reading closely, reading well, and bringing this critical attention to bear on his or her own ideas and prose. If, as Lester Faigley argues, writing instruction has historically been as much about “the selves we want our students to be” as the writing we want them to produce (114), this article demonstrates how Modern Rhetoric made these desires manifest specifically through its teaching of style: style becomes a marker of how Brooks and Warren think about their students as writers.

In addition to charting specific revisions made between editions, I examine the pedagogical apparatus in detail, including specific exercises and questions, in order to provide some of the texture of the textbooks. This combined methodology allows me to begin to answer—for at least one major textbook published during the midcentury—for at least one major textbook published during the midcentury—four key questions that Butler articulates in advocating for increased research into composition’s textbook tradition. The questions are these:

- How do textbook practices reflect the scholarship going on at the time and how [do] they perpetuate views about style that support or contradict these views?
• To what extent are these textbooks indicative of efforts on multiple levels to use style to generate language?
• In what ways do they confirm or contradict some of the practices labeled “current-traditional” by the critics of the time?
• How do the textbooks accept or resist popular conceptions of style regarding clarity or grammar? (*Out of Style* 151)

As my analysis will illustrate, Brooks and Warren’s approach to style differs significantly from our typical views of midcentury style instruction: *Modern Rhetoric* is not primarily concerned with correctness, clarity, or what we might call, from Cicero, the plain style.¹ Instead, by crafting a rhetoric from a more literary tradition, and by drawing on their significant experiences as successful writers of different genres, Brooks and Warren commit themselves to an effective middle style where the domains of literature and composition productively intersect.² Particularly in the editions where students are asked to both invent stylistically minded content and manipulate existing language for better effect, *Modern Rhetoric* imagines both students and the teaching of writing in interesting, rich, and unexpected ways. A focus on style also allows us to see that these productive pedagogies do not remain consistent throughout editions; instead, we notice that when discussion of style and opportunities to practice stylistic and rhetorical competence decline in the second and fourth editions, so too do the occasions for composing meaningful writing. Instruction in style thus serves as one marker of how (or whether) students were asked to think and write in rich, meaningful ways. I offer this historical analysis both for its own merit in deepening our understanding of our field, and as a potential fulcrum to pry open how we might continue to teach something like “style” amid competing and constricting cultural pressures that all too often cast students, their writing, and their stylistic choices in ever-narrowing terms.

**The Story’s Beginning: The First Edition’s Ambitious Treatment of Style (1949)**

Although they had worked and thought together as friends and students—at both Vanderbilt and Oxford Universities—it was at Louisiana State University (LSU), where Brooks and Warren were faced with teaching four undergraduate classes each semester (in addition to producing scholarship and editing the journal the *Southern Review*), that they developed a pedagogy of close reading and writing in the classroom. Several contexts helped to shape the ways these classroom pedagogies translated into the textbook *Modern Rhetoric*: the tensions between the fields of literature and composition as they confronted one another, changing ideas about students and literacy, and the difficulty of translating pedagogical goals for textbook publication.
Certainly, the birth of new critical theories and methodologies also served as an important context for *Modern Rhetoric*, as did the intense, collaborative relationship between Brooks and Warren.3 James A. Grimshaw Jr.’s excellent collection of correspondence between Brooks and Warren illustrates how the men often discussed the very real problem of how to make *Modern Rhetoric* useful for students. The collected correspondence shows that the men struggled to create a rhetoric textbook that was both theoretically and pedagogically sound, and their discussions of style are concerned with both their own style in the textbook and how to teach the subtle workings of language to students.

*Modern Rhetoric* is first mentioned in Brooks and Warren’s letter exchange in November 1942, just after they had committed to writing a first-year rhetoric for Harcourt Brace.4 Although the letters often echo the duo’s frustration with trying to generate initial ideas without being able to talk face-to-face (Warren was teaching in Minnesota at the time), this language is nearly always coupled with the joy the two found in the six-year intellectual and pedagogical collaboration of authoring the first edition, published in 1949. Warren writes, for example, “When I think how pleasant even this chore would be if we could talk it out together and how terrible it is in grim solitude, I gnaw my knuckles” (Grimshaw 126).

Much of the epistolary exchange concerning *Modern Rhetoric* centers on the drafting, reading, redrafting, and revision of the chapters on style (“Style,” “Diction,” “Metaphor,” “Situation and Tone,” and “The Final Integration”). Each chapter goes through several rounds of revisions with much dialogue about their shape, content, the practical strategies that might help students learn the workings of style, and what the authors hope their textbook will contribute overall to writing instruction. Among the innovations that Brooks and Warren wished to undertake was a “functional treatment” of grammar dealing primarily with errors that typically occur in student writing, and a chapter on “Rhythm”—“a new feature of such books, [which] could be a very useful one for a good many students” (Grimshaw 132). Along the way, however, the authors realized that the treatment of style, even as it pertains to grammar, was not as simple and clear-cut as one might think. Brooks frequently described himself as “fumbling toward” a clear way to discuss both grammar and style that would do justice to the workings of language while not confusing the student unnecessarily; in undertaking what they termed a “simplified (or rationalized) section on grammar,” Brooks notes that “it is not merely the job of cutting straight roads through a tangle; you yourself are part of the tangle” (129, 115).3

In many of their letters, there is a palpable sense of struggle as the two men work to distill what they know about language and writing. The correspondence reveals that they had read widely in terms of both rhetorical theory and current textbooks, and of course they had their own substantial experiences as writers to draw upon. Yet despite having already written and published both *Understanding Poetry* and *An
Approach to Literature, the task of authoring a textbook on how to write remained difficult for them. Brooks writes, “I am mortified somewhat that I can’t put this section in fine order myself—you have had to carry so much of the load. But as you know, this subject is a life’s work in itself” (Grimshaw 119). Warren often conveys similar feelings of dissatisfaction: “I am starting another chapter of the text book, overwhelmed by a sense of my inadequacy. The damned thing can start so many fundamental questions, can’t it?” (123). Indeed, the correspondence demonstrates the ripple effect that the composition textbook prompted in terms of Brooks and Warren’s rethinking of their treatment of subjects such as metaphor and style in their other, literature-based textbooks.6

Their letters also highlight the men’s attention to their own style. Warren opines, “I am very dissatisfied with my own style in the chapter on description. It is both clumsy and dull. We’ve got to strike on a really simple and attractive treatment for the book, and I’m certainly fumbling yet” (Grimshaw 112). Often they wrote and rewrote entire chapters (of up to seventy pages or so) wholesale, despairing at their own prose style and its “dullness.” Given this commitment to their own style, it is perhaps no surprise that the assorted chapters on style were of particular interest to both men; it was these chapters which, even as Brooks finished off the last stages of assembling the textbook, he continued to send to Warren for feedback.

As they worked toward an effective style in their own writing, the men also gained a better sense of the middle style they hoped to encourage in students. Guided primarily by the rhetorical situation and the writer’s purpose, students reading the book are encouraged to embrace some elements of a more literary “high” style (such as irony or intricate sentence rhythms and patterns) while being simultaneously charged with relying on a “low” style to make the student’s own relationship to both the subject and the audience clear and approachable. Students are warned repeatedly against “straining” for an effect, particularly a sentimental effect that we might associate with the dramatic affectations of high style (Brooks and Warren, 3rd. ed. 485, 489, 499).

To impress on students the value of a “good, clear, anonymous style,” then, Warren advocated for more exercises and examples “well chosen and tied together,” so that they might illustrate possibilities while steering clear of “an absolute ideal of style” (Grimshaw 34–35). Warren writes to Brooks:

The chapter might carry some exercises. Make the students do some revisions of bad passages, drawn from standard sources or composed for the occasion. Make him find some bad passages in our body of selections and readings or in our own prose for criticism and possible revision. Give him a set of facts and ideas in synoptic form and have him embody them in several different kinds of style—loose and informal, humorous, formal, etc. Make him take a passage in one style and put it into another by locating the key words and phrases, the special rhythms, etc. and changing them. (Grimshaw 135, original emphasis)
The willingness evidenced here to submit their own prose for examination and revision by students speaks to their view of style as an ongoing negotiation with language experienced by all writers.\(^7\) It also demonstrates their view of students as capable writers and thinkers.

When *Modern Rhetoric* was finally published, this intense attention to style resulted primarily in lengthy (and at times quite theoretical and abstract) discussions of style, combined with abundant exercises as Warren had suggested. Students are instructed to not only compare and describe particular styles and tones, but to practice shaping sample selections of their writing (or their imitations of others’ style and structure via their own content) to explore a range of stylistic and tonal possibilities. Students are asked to think a good deal about how style can shape an essay and to pinpoint—on the level of the sentence and beyond—how particular stylistic and rhetorical effects are achieved.

The textbook’s apparatus regularly entreats students to both pay attention to particular stylistic problems or choices and reflect on the larger implications of style in communication. Some examples of questions, drawn from throughout the book, include:

- Does the element in question do its particular job in the expressive pattern of the whole?
- Can you rewrite the sentences so as to bring them into accord with the style of the first three and the last two? Consider diction and tone particularly.
- For example, what is gained by writing “a large percentage” rather than “many”?
- In comparing them, we are inclined to say that they differ merely in “style.” But does not the difference in style carry with it a difference in content? What is the difference between what each version “says”? If Smith’s version is to be preferred, try to indicate why, making special reference to his choice of diction, sentence structure, rhythm, and any other elements of style that seem relevant.

As seen here, the first edition of *Modern Rhetoric* aims to discuss and engage difficult issues in writing with students through attention to specific sentences and through careful attention to style as related to both form and meaning.\(^8\) The approach is at once rhetorically and aesthetically oriented, combining what appears to be a literary sensitivity toward language with a pragmatic approach to how writing strives toward a particular purpose and affects audiences. A chapter titled “The Final Integration” demonstrates this trend, and aims to synthesize the work of earlier chapters on diction, tone, metaphor, and style, ending with six full pages of exercises that supplement the several pages of exercises that followed each previous chapter. Exercises range from prompting students to map rhythmic patterns in ways similar to poetic scansion, to requesting that students rewrite particular sentences and paragraphs to achieve a clearer or more effective rhythm.
It might be useful to pause and note how Brooks and Warren define and describe style in this first edition. They write,

First, and most important, there is style as shaped by the writer’s specific purpose—the choice and arrangement of words as determined by the audience addressed and the purpose at hand. Second, we have style as shaped by the writer’s general environment [. . .] as in a manner of writing characteristic of a whole age [. . .] Third, we have style as shaped by the writer’s own personality. (330–31)

What we might recognize as rhetorical, contextual, and expressivist understandings of style, thus combine, the authors argue, at the level of the sentence via the “rhythms” of the writing, rhythms that students are encouraged to find and craft through familiar practices such as reading their writing aloud. Unlike what the histories of mid-twentieth-century style pedagogy usually tell us, a rhetorical purpose is established here first and foremost, coupled with a contextual understanding of how style is situated historically. Despite the familiar claims of new critics treating each text on its own terms, then, Brooks and Warren’s definition of style as multifaceted, rhetorical, and almost heteroglossic demonstrates a more complex, situated, student-focused, and rhetorically minded view of texts than we might suspect. Indeed, Brooks and Warren’s definition seems to align fairly well with Butler’s definition of style:

Style is the deployment of rhetorical resources, in written discourse, to create and express meaning [. . .] Style involves the use of written language features as habitual patterns, rhetorical options, and conscious choices at the sentence and word level [. . .] even though the effects of these features extend to broader areas of discourse and beyond. (Out of Style 3)

Historically, style has been defined in a variety of ways that tend to privilege either the written text as translation of thought (with style as the “dressing” to this thought), the writer (as in “style makes the man”), or more recently, the interplay of elements within the rhetorical situation and the production of “effects.” In both Butler’s and Brooks and Warren’s definitions, however, style is not something to dress up words once meaning has been established, but instead is a force both constitutive to and generative of meaning itself. Paying attention to style necessitates paying attention to sentences and their relationships; Lydia Fakundiny, for example, defines style as having to do “with the way each sentence works, what shape it makes as it moves, and with the cumulative effect of such shapes in the run of language, the discourse” (713).

Attending to style in the ways Brooks and Warren suggest in their exercises—within and across sentences—allows writers to see the range of rhetorical and discursive possibilities open to them. Current definitions of style thus combine rhetorical awareness, compositional choice, and the way that habitual patterns manifested at the level of the sentence affect larger sections of discourse—facets that, perhaps surprisingly, we see in Brooks and Warren’s 1949 definition of style in Modern Rhetoric.

Most notable about the duo’s initial foray into the teaching of rhetoric and composition is not only a definition of style in line with our contemporary views, but also the book’s intellectual rigor and the way that it imagines students as smart, capable beings with ideas worth sharing in writing. Although *Modern Rhetoric* never reached the popularity of textbooks such as *Writing with a Purpose* or the *Harbrace Handbook*, the first edition was a success, with first-year printings totaling 45,344—more than twice what the publisher had promised (Grimshaw 154). Particularly because the authors had already garnered acclaim not only for their literary work and criticism, but also for their textbooks, especially *Understanding Poetry*, the first edition of *Modern Rhetoric* was highly anticipated and sought out, especially by teachers who, without much support or sometimes training in teaching writing, faced an influx of students.

In many ways, then, this first endeavor into composition was a success for the textbook duo and was well received, the primary critique being only that Brooks and Warren believed students to be “more capable” than they were. A 1950 review of *Modern Rhetoric* in *College English* provides the context for such critiques. Here, reviewer Ernest Samuels compares the Brooks and Warren textbook to another contemporary composition textbook: *Understanding and Using English* (Newman Birk and Genevieve Birk). Samuels frames his review by addressing to what extent each of these textbooks is able to “face up to” the “intolerable burden which the Freshman English class is being made to carry,” the demands of which include

> to introduce the student to the nature of language, train him in analytical reading of literary and nonliterary material, build up his vocabulary, mend his spelling, improve his speech, speed up his reading, make him a clear thinker, and, finally, a socially conscious writer. [..] (55)

Whereas Birk and Birk “do not quarrel with their burden,” trying to attack each of these fronts as best they can, Samuels claims that Brooks and Warren “cut the knot by limiting themselves to rhetoric and the rudiments of logic and rejecting the usual service demands” (55). According to Samuels, the result is that the Birk and Birk textbook spreads itself too thin and thus proves to be too elementary in many ways—it lacks the “rich substance” *Modern Rhetoric* provides (55). However, Samuels goes on to suggest that because Brooks and Warren construct such a specific text, it has the danger of being read as “esoteric doctrine” by a good number of students (54–55).

By laying out the “continuing crisis—or confusion—in the teaching of Freshman English,” Samuels provides a clear pedagogical and professional backdrop against which to read Brooks and Warren’s foray into the field of composition. A clear context for *Modern Rhetoric* is the amount of training composition teachers have had, particularly in relation to exploding university populations. Thus, Birk and Birk’s text is “obviously written by practicing freshmen English teachers for the mass
freshmen of 1950 [...] and directs its primary attention to the immediate writing needs of the student. Even an inexperienced instructor may be trusted with this text, for the authors seem to have him in mind as well as the ill-prepared student” (54). Conversely, Samuels describes *Modern Rhetoric* this way:

As a guide to the technical principles of elementary rhetoric and elementary logic, the book has very real merit, and it should give to a course in composition a coherence and intellectual rigor that is often lacking. But it is clearly not a text that will teach itself. In all fairness it ought to be used with the same close application that is commonly reserved for laboratories in science, which it somewhat resembles in its systematic methods. To the better-than-average student, especially in the second semester of the freshman course, or to the student in a sophomore composition course it offers a rational program for attaining a good prose style. (54–55)

Such analysis, which is grounded in the teachability of the text, is suggestive for both what it reveals about how Brooks and Warren imagined composition students—as more capable than students were typically imagined at the time—and how they imagined their role in supporting teachers through an explicit, yet intellectually rigorous, methodology. By asking both teachers and students to carefully attend to why words and sentences were put together as they were, and what effects these combinations prompted, the authors provide a methodology that unpacks how writing works. Poised between trusting in the abilities of students and teachers while still acknowledging the realities of minimal training, Brooks and Warren’s *Modern Rhetoric* provides thoughtful ways for both interpreting and composing style.

In the eight years that passed between the first edition of 1949 and the second edition of 1958, a number of changes were made that suggest that teachers had mixed responses to the textbook along the lines that the Samuels review notes. In the second edition, Brooks and Warren acknowledge the growing material pressures of teaching writing, and explain in their introduction that the revised edition is now “more practical for classroom use.” They note that the second edition now includes more student themes, a chapter on usage and grammar, more variety in “subject matter and tone” in the readings, and new exercises that “provide the student with more specific and attractive invitations to develop his own skill” (ix). In their correspondence, Brooks and Warren discuss their intentions in the second edition: to both shorten the book and “get the student engaged in writing without too much preliminary doctrine,” a distinct change from the original edition (Grimshaw 210). Despite these “practical” changes, however, the revised edition seems to implicitly address precisely those critiques which suggested that the authors trusted too much in the sentence-level skills of their students (and perhaps their teachers’ training in those matters as well).

The revised edition was therefore embraced by those reviewers and teachers eager to have a more straightforward textbook, who responded positively to the new
organization of the second edition—including the new full chapter on the research paper—which seemed to more clearly privilege categories of (school) writing (Kendall 252). Whereas the first edition ends with the rich array of interactive exercises around style and tone, the second edition instead finishes with the elaborate, more directive and instrumental chapter, “Research Paper.” Brooks and Warren note that this chapter was publisher-driven, “mostly a Harcourt-Brace idea” (Grimshaw 213). Lastly, this more instrumental ending to the second edition is further heightened by the appended “Handbook of Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics” (including a section on the book report).

A comparison of the changes made between editions illustrates the shift away from discussing style:

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<td>48 pages on the paragraph and the sentence</td>
<td>28 pages on the paragraph and the sentence</td>
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<td>1 page on style, buried within “Tone” chapter</td>
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<td>Style defined in its own chapter</td>
<td>Style defined parenthetically</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 pages on rhythm</td>
<td>3 1/2 pages on rhythm</td>
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<tr>
<td>36-page chapter: “The Final Integration”</td>
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<td>23 pages of style and tone exercises</td>
<td>9 pages of style and tone exercises</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 lengthy chapters on tone and style precede “Readings”</td>
<td>Chapter “Research Paper” precedes “Readings”</td>
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As Table 1 illustrates, Brooks and Warren spent a good deal of time defining style in the first edition, whereas in the second edition, style is defined in a parenthetical aside as the “how” of writing (375). Although the language Brooks and Warren use to describe and explore style in the first edition is occasionally clumsy, the second edition jettisons entire sections, suggesting a significant simplification of what students should be taught and, implicitly, what they are thought to be capable of learning. When attended to at all, style becomes an afterthought in this edition, with the focus clearly shifting toward a more formalistic ideology of school writing. Contrary to the idea the authors express in their literature-based textbooks, as well
as what they express in the first edition—that form and style are necessary to understand the meaning of the writing and how it works—the trend in the second edition of *Modern Rhetoric* is to minimize rather than stress these connections.

These changes are certainly related to demands to refashion the composition textbook in order to more adequately serve composition classrooms, a motive the authors themselves suggest in the revised introduction to the textbook. The changes to the second edition may well serve the multiple purposes of the composition classroom through the book’s embodiment as writing manual, exercise book, grammar handbook, and reader; moreover, the style exercises that were not cut no doubt remained productive for students. Yet in its more simplistic approach to style (something to consider in passing, if at all), the second edition eschews the earlier view of students moving between published writing and their own writing as literate actors; instead, the second edition formulates its audience more precisely in terms of the composition student, and a less competent student at that.

A single positive development in the changes from first to second edition of *Modern Rhetoric* occurs in the new Part IV: The Research Paper in the chapter “The Final Version: Writing and Rewriting.” In addition to mentioning rewriting as a necessary part of the writing process, a subsection titled “Writing the Paper” maps the production of a student paper from initial draft, to a clarifying sentence outline, to a revised draft. For the first time in *Modern Rhetoric*, student writing is included as a text that should be “read” and studied. The subsection includes revisions the student apparently made, particularly on the paragraph level, and the application exercises ask students to suggest other revisions. These modifications in the 1958 edition more visibly demonstrate the ways that Brooks and Warren seemed to value student writing quite early. Including student work marked the beginnings of student writing as valued textual material, as well as a pedagogical approach more grounded in revision and interaction with student writing—changes that would be productively expanded in the following edition.


Perhaps in response to critiques such as those in *CCC* reviews, the third edition aims to repair some of the severed connections between style and meaning. In the third edition, the discussion of style is invigorated somewhat from the second edition and treated more directly as well. The section on style, although still quite short at two pages, now begins this way:

> The reader of this text may be surprised to find that the term *style* is now appearing for the first time. He might have well expected a long discussion of style much earlier in the book. But though the term is mentioned here for the first time, actually, from the
very first page of the book, we have been discussing style. The plan for conducting an argument or presenting a piece of exposition, the means for connecting paragraph with paragraph, the choice of diction, the handling of tone—all are aspects of style. (497)

Instead of the second edition’s parenthetical definition of style and its overwhelming and intimidating introduction to the topic, which reads “the real difficulty in discussing style comes out at this point,” Brooks and Warren now ground style in many of the elements of writing that students have already been practicing (2nd ed. 378). Although the authors still acknowledge that style is difficult, they do not pose it as impossible, but return to situating it rhetorically:

So far in this chapter we have seen how difficult it is to isolate and determine the specific value of each of the factors that control tone and rhythm. And it would be much more difficult to accomplish this with respect to style in general, which is a larger concept and represents the interplay of all sorts of elements, including tone and rhythm themselves. There is no one proper shape for a sentence, nor length for a paragraph, nor one “correct” diction. The “correctness” will depend on the occasion and the writer’s purpose and the context in which the word or sentence is placed [. . .] style itself is a harmonious interplay of all the elements and devices of writing. (3rd ed. 498)

In their attempts to clarify the role that style plays in writing, Brooks and Warren have somewhat surprisingly returned to the language of the first edition of Modern Rhetoric. We thereby see that the authors are continuing to negotiate how to effectively talk about style in ways that are practical and useful to student understanding. Although questions of style and opportunities for students to describe and practice different stylistics were pretty sharply curtailed in the second edition, here the reinvigorated and more direct attention to style is mirrored by an increase in exercises on style: in addition to reworking many of the exercises and punctuating subsections with additional exercises, the third edition contains four new pages of exercises on style at the end of the chapter. Importantly, style is richly defined instead of relegated to matters of correctness or grammar.

An example that asks students to compare selections from Robert Hichens’s The Garden of Allah to T. E. Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom illustrates the focus and complexity of questions within the third edition’s chapter on style, and might provide some of the texture of Brooks and Warren’s treatment of style:

The two passages that follow describe scenes in the Arabian desert. The scenes are different: that by Hichens pictures a minaret and palm trees caught in a windless noon; that by Lawrence, a desert landscape, now green from recent rains. Yet the descriptions do have certain things in common, including a curiously similar way of describing the wind: “The slight winds were not at play” and “Playful packs of winds came crossing . . .” What decisively differentiates the two passages is the quality of mood, atmosphere, and tone.

Write a brief essay in which you compare and contrast the style of these two passages. Does either author make you see, vividly and clearly? Does either of them
try to add a mystical element to the scene? How? Is the effort successful? Is there any straining for particular effects? Does either writer exploit suggestion? Is either passage “sentimental” and overstated? Compare the use of metaphor and rhythm in the two passages. Compare also the attitude taken toward the subject and toward the reader. In your essay be specific and give examples. (505)

Here we see Brooks and Warren inviting students to account for the intricacies of two complex pieces of prose writing. In the lengthy list of questions they provide, the authors encourage students to approach the stylistic workings of the passages from a number of angles, both aesthetic and rhetorical, and to assess the effects of style in both conveying the scene appropriately and appealing to the reader.

Interestingly, this renewed and rich attention to style is complemented by a parallel development: the third edition’s increased attention to student writing. Here, Brooks and Warren provide two complete student papers, describe the changes the student made across several drafts, and provide a lengthy narrative that unfolds around the student, Susan, and her attempts to write her critical paper on Yeats. Readers follow Susan through a process of researching her topic, brainstorming her argument, organizing her ideas, and writing a first draft. The authors then simulate a discussion between Susan and her roommate about the paper. Although a bit artificial, the scene does dramatize a thoughtful peer’s response to student writing, and achieves Brooks and Warren’s stated goal of illustrating “in some detail the need for rewriting and the ways in which one does it” (Grimshaw 239).

Moreover, this section is followed by three full pages that “look at a few of the specific problems that Susan uncovered and follow her line of reasoning as she uncovered them” (Brooks and Warren, 3rd ed. 558). Susan’s revised outline and a revised draft of her paper then follow, accompanied by marginal comments and an end comment by the (simulated) instructor. Here the authors have intensified the reflexive quality of the application exercises, putting students more thoroughly in dialogue with the revisions made to the sample student writing papers as well as asking students to respond to the comments the authors offer. Compared to earlier editions, the third edition presents the most robust opportunities for students to investigate student writing with the same focus and precision that they have applied to published writing; students must account for stylistic and rhetorical choices and changes, gauging their efficacy and making additional suggestions for revision. Questions about revision include these:

• Do you agree with the instructor’s comment? Has he been too generous with Susan? Do you find difficulties in the revised paper that he has not noted? Has he, on the other hand, failed to mention features of this paper that you think have merit? (585)

• Make a detailed examination of the differences between the original and the revised forms of this paper [. . .]. Make your own notes on the significance of Susan’s various revisions, and if you think that sometimes her revisions are for the worse, indicate why you think so. (585)
Do you think that Susan was right to exclude her paragraph 13 of her first draft from the revised paper? Indicate why or why not. (587)

By combining questions like these with more specific questions about style (such as Susan’s revised diction for some of her key concepts), the third edition returns to valuing the intense student interaction with texts that leads to specific and mindful stylistics choices, similar to what we saw in the first edition. Moreover, this third edition more ably links style to invention, revision, and student writing through the increasingly developed pedagogical apparatus. In short, students are asked to be more involved in ascertaining and describing specific revisions as well as generating other possibilities for revision. As students become more apt at assessing how style works in their writing, they open up more opportunities to revise, drawing from a storehouse of possibilities by which they can best convey their ideas and produce specific effects. It is in this edition, therefore, that we see the authors’ attention to style, and their attention to student writing and revision, most fully dovetail and support one another.


The rich pedagogical success of the third edition was, unfortunately, short-lived. Unlike their literature-based textbooks, in which a vocabulary for discussing style and how it matters in a text continued to develop in each subsequent edition, *Modern Rhetoric’s* fourth edition—like the streamlined second edition—illustrates a regressive turn and an overly reified schematic for writing.11 This major change can be attributed to two factors: first, an overall much shorter book (approximately half the length of earlier editions); and second, a specific focus on the book being used at the high school level—both ideas largely initiated by the publisher. Harcourt Brace had encouraged the publication of a shorter third edition in 1972; this version reduced the 880 pages of the third edition to a neatly halved 440 pages. When the time came to suggest revisions for a fourth edition, Harcourt Brace proposed revising the textbook for their School department (meaning, geared for high schools). Although not mentioned in their correspondence, the rippling effects of open admissions policies that were instituted between the third and fourth editions most likely played a role in Harcourt Brace’s recommendations for both a shorter third edition for college students and the fourth edition for high school students. The publishers suggested that for the new audience, the following changes would need to be made: more focus on persuasion and exposition; fewer abstractions and more concrete and explicit teaching of “individual steps” that happen in writing; and a book that would be less “tightly woven” in terms of its integration of literate activities—the book should aim to cover only “A to Q” instead of “A to Z” (Grimshaw 350, 354). In short, the
fourth revision was planned to be more modest, more simplistic, more scaffolded, and more precisely directed at a younger student body.

It is worth noting that Brooks and Warren needed some talking into this School edition of *Modern Rhetoric*: they were unsure about the effort; the trade-offs in terms of their time, which might be used “more profitably on other projects”; and ultimately, whether they could produce an “honest” book with which they would be satisfied (Grimshaw 350, 354). In the end, the duo was persuaded by the admiration the book had gained, by the encouragement of their editors and their colleagues, and by the prospect of making a book that could be “found and used” by high school teachers who “were at sea” about how to productively teach writing (354–55). Although hesitant about the changes that would be made, Brooks and Warren seemed motivated by a pedagogical earnestness to help teachers who needed greater support. Of course, royalties from the book were also a factor; however, throughout the correspondence Brooks and Warren worried that the royalties of this particular edition would be “meager at best,” so financial gain was not a strong motivating factor (350).

Given the new audience, the effects in the revised fourth edition are dramatic. Over half of the exercise sets in the “Tone and Other Aspects of Style” chapter have been cut, including some of the most interesting comparison exercises; also cut are the imitation exercises, which gave students a direct opportunity to practice writing and to make stylistic choices. At least sixty pages have been cut from the sections dealing with paragraphs and sentences, diction, tone, and style, and even the large Part II of the book on the forms of discourse has been trimmed by about 160 pages, to half its length. The only section that seems to have grown is the final section on note-taking and the research paper. These expanded sections emphasize the processes surrounding the research paper that are still in use today in many high schools (different types of outlines, research recorded in a highly specific manner on note cards, and so on).

Although the fourth edition makes a point to say that it employs more student papers, the papers used are significantly impoverished as examples of rich student writing. The authors have kept one example of student research writing from the third edition, but the lengthier discussion of Susan’s writing process through several stages, her discussion with her peer reviewer, and the substantial set of questions about style and revision choices that followed her drafts are all now gone. This reductive pattern intensifies with the new student examples of the critical paper. Brooks and Warren now provide a short story and a poem, with a handful of short student responses to each. It is first important to note that these papers go through no initial process of invention and no revision; they stand as monolithic products apparently produced on demand. Moreover, the examples are juxtaposed in order to illustrate “good” and “bad” papers: for example, the language asserts that “Debbie succeeds, where Bob and Joan fail” (356). In their analyses of student success or failure, the authors offer
only “correct” interpretations and examples from the story itself instead of examples from the student papers. Most strikingly, not a single question asks the student to return to the student writing and ascertain how and why it works (or doesn’t). Students are no longer encouraged to judge revisions on the sentence level for effective stylistic and rhetorical choices; the examples given do not function as occasions to think about writing and its effects. In contrast to the rich pedagogical apparatus of the third edition, then, the short sample papers in the fourth edition are presented as self-sufficient models, and the application prompts that follow merely ask the student to replicate something similar on a slightly different topic.

Thus, as Table 2 illustrates, the opportunities for students to puzzle through language and style and to try their hand at revision shrink both substantially and substantively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55 pages of student writing</td>
<td>25 pages of student writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation model</td>
<td>Replication and success/failure model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multistaged invention and revision process</td>
<td>Single drafts produced on demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with content and form by students</td>
<td>“Analysis” of content provided by the book’s authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students reflect on composition strategies, style, and effects</td>
<td>No questions for students on compositions, style, or effect of prose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By way of summary, then, although this fourth edition is more strictly a rhetoric—without readings and without a handbook—it is, compared to the previous editions, the least rhetorical. The fourth edition strikes the presence of a real interlocutor for writing (Susan’s roommate), one who can prompt dialogue and revision; instead, only the teacher and his monolithic comments engage with student work. The fourth edition therefore provides students the least opportunity to think about their writing as broadly engaged in a rhetorical situation. And although the fourth edition more succinctly stresses the “reciprocal relationship between function and form [. . .] the function intended may be constantly modified in the very act of embodying it in a form” (39), there are now few opportunities for students to think about how they’re presenting their ideas through language and why it would matter one way or another. Instead, there is a marked shift away from technologies of engaged, revised,
and attentive writing practices, and a shift toward reading practices that are much more conservative. Style, not surprisingly, is largely lost along the way.\textsuperscript{13}

Across editions, \textit{Modern Rhetoric} thus proves a highly contradictory text, unable to develop or sustain a consistent trajectory in the face of changing pressures from the market and perhaps from the field. This limited final edition of the textbook ultimately creates a new, more limited view of students: the disappointing result of the trajectory is an impoverished sense of both student writing and students writing. Indeed, Richard Ohmann’s language from “Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language” seems appropriate in conveying the practices of the fourth edition, especially when studied in relationship to the third edition: at the end of \textit{Modern Rhetoric}’s trajectory, the authors “inadvertently suggest to students that they be less inquiring and less intelligent than they are capable of being” (390).

\textbf{Style in Memoriam: Winning Battles, Losing the War}

The analysis of changes I’ve provided gives a sense of the texture of assignments and the culture of writing established throughout the \textit{Modern Rhetoric} series. I’ve argued that the revisions we see in the text and the overall chronology are most productively read as a series of ongoing negotiations—between cultural pressures and disciplinary desires; between market forces and the authors’ own commitment to writing an “honest book”; between changing perceptions of students, style, and literacy; and across ideological and pedagogical grounds, as the fields of composition and literature both confront one another and individuate themselves. Charting these fluctuations over an entire line of a textbook provides nuanced, contextualized, and concrete evidence of both innovation and reification. \textit{Modern Rhetoric} makes this case clearly—the second edition corrected for the eclectic and abstract first edition, the third edition corrected for the overcorrection of the second edition by reopening questions of style, and the fourth and final edition shut these questions down once and for all. \textit{Modern Rhetoric} thus participates in, and in its earliest editions perhaps even foreshadows, what Butler has termed the Golden Age of style. Uniting stylistic approaches and techniques drawn from the fields of literature, composition, and rhetoric, Brooks and Warren encourage students to explore the workings of style in published writing and in their own writing, as well as to participate in the productive relationship between style and revision. Yet similar to the field of composition more broadly, the authors’ innovative attempts to teach style are ultimately cast aside in the final edition, and their pedagogy becomes the poorer for it.

What we do not know is how particular teachers and students have used these books in their specific classrooms. However, the research I’ve detailed so far does illustrate, as Mike Rose has contended, the way that textbooks represent “the repository of knowledge on a given subject at a given time” to the broader culture ("Speculations")
Here, this repository is specifically inflected by discipline: unlike Brooks and Warren's literature-based textbooks, which generally illustrate a model of pedagogical growth, Modern Rhetoric presents a model of uncertainty and instability, swinging from extreme to extreme and ending its line with the most conservative version in its thirty years. As I have shown, this period from 1949 to 1979 illustrates both the changing and diverse nature of practices and values regarding students, writing, and style as well as how these practices eventually reified, resulting in a less progressive, less student-centered, and ultimately less pedagogically interesting textbook.

To be fair, though, if we are not going to be surprised by the final edition’s traditional and limited iteration, then we must, in fact, be surprised by the short-lived innovations of the first and third editions. From one point of view, it is remarkable that Brooks and Warren attempted, and remained committed to, such a project for more than thirty years, particularly when their other textbooks were more influential and more lucrative (the Understanding Poetry series is the prime example). There is much in the correspondence to suggest that both men devoted as much energy to Modern Rhetoric as they did to the Understanding Poetry series. Modern Rhetoric went through an equal number of editions, despite its being, by Warren’s account, a book “of less general interest and reputation” as compared to Understanding Poetry (Grimshaw 223). No doubt this different kind of book presented new challenges; yet the correspondence itself suggests that thinking through challenges such as these provided much of the spirited relationship between the two men as intellectual collaborators. Such a commitment, though not necessarily indicative of their interest in the field of composition, surely shows some level of commitment to composition students and to the teaching of writing. Remembering that Brooks and Warren’s friendship began in a composition-oriented pedagogical situation—the senior Warren looking over one of Brooks’s freshman themes—we see in the early editions how the two took their own assertion, “there is no short cut to the teaching of composition,” seriously.

Eventually, though, their salutatory attempts in Modern Rhetoric to focus students’ stylistic decisions on their own prose (either via the exercises in the first edition or in the questions and working through of the student text in the third edition) stall, despite the ways that this language persists and flourishes in their literature textbooks. Unlike the literature textbooks, the composition textbook loses many of its earlier principles that, although perhaps too ambitious, nonetheless provided ample opportunities for students to use style to both describe and generate language in innovative ways. Moreover, this productive interrogation of style encouraged students to link their own writing processes and essays to those of published authors.

Modern Rhetoric offers such an interesting case study for textbook history, the history of the teaching of style, and composition’s own history, then, precisely because of the ways that it both uses and exceeds something often called current-traditional rhetoric, the rhetoric which many scholars have claimed dominated the
mid-twentieth century. Whether this is ultimately because the text emerged from outside composition (although in dialogue with it), because it was written at the disciplinary intersection of composition and literature, or because it was authored by two men who were, above all else, writers, I’ll leave to others to decide. What is important to note is that style, for Brooks, Warren, and their students, was something more than clarity or correctness; style was not the dressing up of thought once writing was finished, nor a description of how thought is “translated” into language. Reading *Modern Rhetoric* through the lens of style allows us to see how this textbook differed from most attempts to teach style (or not teach it at all) during that time, while simultaneously noticing how the textbook struggled to maintain this independent viewpoint.

Scholars such as Robert Connors have described the mid-twentieth century precisely in terms of such fluctuations that marked the growth of the field. In “Textbooks and the Evolution of the Discipline,” Connors describes the period of 1965 to 1980 as largely marked by “scattered ad hoc experimentalism,” with more rhetorically and theoretically informed textbooks emerging primarily after 1980 (191). *Modern Rhetoric* provides a counter-example: from the first edition of 1949, the text was rhetorically and theoretically informed, even if the theoretical perspective was drawn from the experiences of these professional writers and their field of literature, instead of the budding field of composition. This tension—between Brooks and Warren’s own expertise and the newly burgeoning field of composition that *Modern Rhetoric* tried, in its own way, to enter—is felt in at least three ways. First, Brooks and Warren’s work seems to follow Connors’s observation that composition textbooks have always “responded to the preferences of the teachers cast up by the culture” (178). In fact, perhaps because rhetoric and composition were not their primary fields, Brooks and Warren seem perhaps too quick to address criticisms. Their willingness to respond to teachers’ perceived needs may have actually spurred Brooks and Warren to act in ways that were a bit shortsighted within a field that was not their primary area. Although their textbook did not fall prey to rhetorical atomism—they did not, for example, insist that students separate out the parts of discourse or master sentences before paragraphs (indeed, quite the opposite)—the final edition of *Modern Rhetoric* does largely eschew style in ways that parallel broader trends in the field as it moves from the 1970s to the 1980s.

Second, this oscillation between editions is indicative of epistemologies and practices from literature and composition beginning to bump against one another. *Modern Rhetoric*’s editions negotiate emerging writing process theory (although drafting and “rewriting,” as the authors called it, played a role even from the first edition in 1949) as well as the emerging force of the research paper that later began to dominate the textbook. The shifting disciplinary lines between composition and literature surely account for many of the fluctuations I have traced between edi-
tions of the Brooks and Warren textbooks. However, unlike their literature-based textbooks, which, as Mark Jancovich puts it, “appeared at a time when there was no coherent practice for the teaching of literature as literature” and thus “addressed this absence”(87), Modern Rhetoric seemed unable to capitalize on a similar phenomenon of uncertainty occurring in the field of composition: this Brooks and Warren textbook could not clearly fill a disciplinary gap through innovation, perhaps because it could not maintain what was innovative, including a complex approach to teaching style.

Lastly, we see the tension between composition’s developing identity and theoretical underpinnings in comparison to Brooks and Warren’s different expertise reflected in their decision to use the modes of discourse as the text’s organizing structure. Unlike James McRimmon’s popular Writing with a Purpose series, which abandoned the “conventional fourfold classification of writing” (Connors, “Rise and Fall” 452) in favor of a more holistic approach that left the power of deciding the type of writing to the student and her purposes, Modern Rhetoric seems to intensify the reliance on the modes of discourse across editions.17 Remembering that early reviews praised the duo’s work with the modes of discourse—particularly because Modern Rhetoric fulfilled a desire for this traditional model as other popular textbooks abandoned it and tried other approaches—helps to explain the fourth edition’s changes. In many ways, continued reliance on the modes helped to create a simplified text for a new (less experienced) audience and a new context (high schools). In the fourth edition, most of the other material of the text and the ways it organizes writing—as connected to reading, for example—falls away, leaving the modes as the most significant ordering structure of the textbook. Even the discussion of the modes is simplified in the fourth edition to half of its original length—presenting a simplification of a simplification.

Despite the authors’ desire to treat acts of composition seriously, and the fact that their overall pedagogy challenges atomism, Modern Rhetoric comes to rely more and more on the modes, jettisoning lengthier discussions and exercises pertaining to tone and style, and eventually becoming more mechanical, rule-driven, and monolithic. Despite their insistence that modes of discourse rarely appear in “pure form,” Brooks and Warren consistently claim throughout editions that studying the modes in isolation is, in fact, the best way to learn each type of writing (1st ed. 33; 4th ed. 42). If we think about style beyond the level of the sentence, we might argue that style becomes even more crucial in uniting different types of discourse within a single composition; thus, relying on the modes not only ruptures the rhetorical aims of the textbook from its practice, but also diminishes the opportunities for students to extend their promising work with style to more complex relationships between discourses. Reliance on the modes thus derails the more complex views of language and style present in the textbook, as well as the promising partnership between literary and rhetorical approaches to reading and writing. The choices to
use earlier textbooks as models, to borrow their taxonomy of the modes, and to leave this organizing structure unquestioningly in place despite evolution in the field of composition certainly played a role in curtailing the textbook’s promise.

My intention here has been not only to fill in a gap in our history of style instruction, but also to offer one route to rethinking periods, pedagogies, and even people, which may have become “familiar” through the terms of their stable representations. I hope this work helps to encourage what Carr, Carr, and Schultz describe as “a changed disposition to present textbooks, one alert to sedimented histories of dominant cultural practices as well as to their occasional playful, experimental, or marginal features that offer a reservoir of possible new initiatives to investigate” (208). The account of *Modern Rhetoric* I’ve provided illustrates this interaction of both the dominant and the innovative within the context of the complex negotiations between disciplines, pedagogies, and the changing cultural views of literacy, style, and students that textbooks make visible. Historical research is useful not only in unearthing unexplored remnants of the past, however, but for the powerful ways it helps us to rethink and revise our contemporary pedagogies, whether guided by textbooks or not. For example, there is a positive lesson to be taken from the pedagogical development in the third edition of *Modern Rhetoric*, a lesson that encourages us to reinvigorate our teaching via concrete exercises and revisions of our frequently used materials. In their portrayal of a student drafting, revising, and consulting with others about her essay, Brooks and Warren provide an early model of taking students and their writing seriously. And in the ways that Brooks and Warren clearly found stylistic exercises interesting and wanted to encourage their students to find it interesting too, they offer a model of shared intellectual inquiry in this edition. Despite these moments of promise and interest, however, there is also a lesson in the final edition of *Modern Rhetoric*, a text that became overly reified and mechanical, much like certain new critical practices. *Modern Rhetoric* reminds us to attend to those elements of our pedagogy that might inadvertently work at cross-purposes to our other goals and values, as was the case with “the modes” undoing the more productive work with style.

Most broadly, my investigation of Brooks and Warren’s specific attempts to think about and teach style to beginning university writers illustrates the ways in which style, historically and in our contemporary context, often remains difficult to grasp, difficult to explain, and difficult to teach. Even though the pair sometimes comes close to evening the playing field between student writers as stylists and published authors as stylists, the final edition of *Modern Rhetoric* clearly implies that questions of style are more appropriate for interpreting the writing of others than they are for the interpretative work of (the student) composing. Strikingly, the more reductive view of style that eventually emerges in the fourth edition is in marked difference to the duo’s literature textbooks, where stylistic study continues to blossom across editions,
even borrowing, at times, language that had originated in *Modern Rhetoric*. Keeping these differences in mind can help us notice how our language for and discussions of style may be central in certain spheres of our teaching, yet become limited or exiled within other practices—a crucial step toward exploring how we might engage our own assumptions and difficulties in teaching form and style as constitutive to meaning in reading and in writing. Brooks and Warren also provide a clear example of the ways that we, as teachers and as theorists, might often attempt to open language up, testing new possibilities and pedagogies, only to revert back to more comfortable (or better received) systems or positions. Across the textbooks, style is a key locus of these fluctuations: discussions and exercises about style wax and wane; style is and then is not a privileged learning system for both reading and writing texts; students are and then are not presumed capable of stylistic dexterity and rhetorical sophistication. Given the ongoing climate surrounding education that presses for increasingly narrow conceptions of students, their abilities, and what good writing means, such histories are useful in assessing how we arrived at this juncture, as well as how we might better respond to the changing—and often limited—pictures of students and writing the larger culture reproduces.

**Notes**

1. See Kathryn Flannery’s excellent monograph *The Emperor’s New Clothes* for an ideological history and critique of plain, or normative, style.

2. See Richard Lanham’s chapter “High, Middle, and Low Styles” in *Analyzing Prose* for a helpful discussion of these hard-to-pin-down descriptors. Although hard to define, the term *middle style* seems to capture how Brooks and Warren saw their task: providing a way for students to draw from “low” style to appear clear, rational, and approachable to their audience, while nonetheless employing literary devices and syntactical patterns that we associate with a more formal, “high” style.

3. The story of New Criticism is at once familiar and facile—however, the story of New Criticism is in many ways more complex than its representation in history often acknowledges, particularly when that history is viewed through the lens of material, pedagogical artifacts such as those explored here. See Gerald Graff’s incisive discussion of New Criticism, helpful in understanding the impetus of the new critical methodology, as well as why it failed, in more complex terms. Jancovich and Frank Lentricchia also provide useful analyses of new critical ideologies and their effects on English studies.

4. Spanning four decades, the letters provide the material texture of both the personal and intellectual friendship, as well as the collaborative partnership, that these men built. Brooks and Warren wrote to one another regularly, sharing updates on the very real academic work of their many textbook projects, critiquing one another’s drafts of literary and critical work, and passing along news and updates from their professional and private lives.

5. Eventually, Brooks and Warren collaborated with linguist Harold Whitehall as an advisor to assist them with creating their functional grammar.

6. See my essay “Teaching with Style” for more on how grappling with style in *Modern Rhetoric*, particularly the rhetorical elements of style, expands Brooks and Warren’s pedagogical repertoire, allowing them to attend to (and ask students to attend to) a wider range of stylistic effects in textbooks such as *An Approach to Literature*. 
7. Similar questions regarding style are later taken up in another central textbook in the field: Edward P. J. Corbett’s *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*.

8. Louis Milic’s work explores the perennial question of how form relates to meaning. His essay “Theories of Style and Their Implications for the Teaching of Composition” provides an astute and concise overview of key perspectives and their implications for teaching writing.

9. This last position is what Howard calls a “contextualist” stylistics. For more on the history of this progression, see Tom Pace’s “Style and the Renaissance of Composition Studies.”

10. See, for example, Lyle Kendall’s 1961 review of the second edition (the shorter one) that critiques the textbook’s organization and claims the textbook is more of a “manual for teachers, rather than a working text for students” (252; original emphasis).

11. To compare the findings here about *Modern Rhetoric* to changes made across editions in Brooks and Warren’s literature textbooks, see my essay “Teaching with Style.”

12. The expansion of the research paper mirrors the growth of this genre in the field of composition at this time, although it is difficult to know how or whether that change in the discipline affected Brooks and Warren’s revision. It is worth noting that in both cases, the trend toward focus on a discrete research “paper” tended to devalue productive attention to stylistic issues.

13. This diminished focus on style will shortly be the case in the field more broadly, as shown by Butler, Conrons (“Erasure”), and T. R. Johnson and Tom Pace.

14. James Berlin, for example, writes in “Contemporary Composition” that “[i]f the textbooks that sell the most copies tell us anything, they make abundantly clear that most writing teachers accept the assumptions of Current-Traditional Rhetoric, the view that arose contemporaneously with the positivistic position of modern science” (776–77).

15. More attention to style and how it works in writing is one of the key things that composition can continue to learn from literature, as scholars such as Peter Elbow recommend.

16. See Conrons’s “The Erasure of the Sentence” for more on how composition’s work to distinguish itself from other fields and methods resulted in changes both small and large, from the erasure of sentence-level pedagogies—such as sentence-combining and imitation exercises students used to develop more complex sentences—to the “gradual but inevitable hardening into disciplinary form of the field of composition studies as a subfield of English studies” (121).

17. For a history of the modes of discourse, see Conrons, “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse.” See also Frank D’Angelo, “Looking for an Object of Study in the 1970s,” for a history of how the modes of discourse guided many popular rhetorics in the mid-1970s. For an additional critique of the modes as they pertain not only to writers but to readers, see Rose’s “Sophisticated, Ineffective Books.”

18. A key example of this phenomenon is that many of the formal concerns that are eliminated in the second edition of *Modern Rhetoric* (1958) are supplanted into the third edition of *Understanding Poetry* (1960). Clearly, negotiating the differences of reading versus writing style, and literature versus composition, remained a central tension across all of the Brooks and Warren textbooks.

**Works Cited**


